

# Fuelling the future

The part-BP sponsored Energy gallery at the Science Museum in London aims to help young people learn about energy-related issues in an interesting and engaging way. LESLIE VINEY visits the gallery to find out more. PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILES BARNARD

**A**t 5:45pm, when most of London is pouring out of offices and rushing to get home, the Energy gallery on the second floor of the Science Museum is still buzzing with visitors. Absorbed in manipulating the joysticks, footpads and buttons of the interactive games, or engrossed in answering quizzes on the 'Info Zone' computers, it takes a final announcement of 'closing time', for the visitors – young, old, solo and in family groups – to reluctantly leave what they're doing and head downstairs.

The Energy gallery opened on 23 July 2004 and was conceived to help young people, particularly between ages 7-14, to explore and understand how energy powers every aspect of their lives and to question how to meet the planet's growing demands in the future. It is part-funded with a \$3 million (£1.65 million) investment from BP spread over five years – the largest corporate sponsorship the museum has ever received.

The Science Museum and BP were

talking about a possible partnership several years before a commitment was made. Gradually the discussion moved to a shared concern over the public lack of awareness of energy-related issues, and how to best teach them. "There is a huge need in the education world for new methods of teaching energy," says Ian Duffy, business advisor in Social and Community Affairs, who is responsible for BP's involvement with the energy project and its relationship with the Science Museum.

"It is vital to teach this subject in an interesting and engaging way, so we can help reverse the trend of falling numbers of people taking science at higher levels."

Before the partners could discuss any specific content for the gallery, the museum surveyed the targeted Key Stage two and three students on what they knew about energy. "They found that the kids hadn't heard of coal but they did know about nuclear power, because they watched the Simpsons and Homer Simpson worked at a nuclear power plant," explains Ian Adam, director, UK, social and community affairs.

It was clear to the museum exhibition team that for kids to be interested in the 350 square metre (3,768 square foot) gallery, they couldn't rely on traditional static objects to gaze at, but needed to look at interactive possibilities. "Kids said they thought energy was boring," says Hannah Redler, the project leader of the gallery and a specialist in contemporary art with a digital component. "We're shamelessly theatrical. We'll do it any way to make it exciting."

Designed by Casson Mann, who had worked on the Museum's award-winning Wellcome wing, and created by 14 different artists or groups, the gallery feels like a playground of interactive activities. Visitors see a beautiful suspended 'Energy ring' from the foyer, which features an LED display of visitor messages and images of exploding particles that visitors control from the gallery.

The most fun is Christian Moeller's electric-shock artwork "Do not touch" – a six-metre pole surrounded by a rubber base, which is an ironic and humorous response from the artist to the Museum's



Action packed: The museum design team recognised from the outset that to keep the kids interested, they needed to look beyond traditional static exhibits.

# Start spinning your arms!



**Full of energy:** Created by 14 different artists or groups, the gallery feels like a playground of interactive activities.

brief to create a physical experience of energy in the gallery. It's entirely safe, but the warning makes people question themselves before they take part in it.

The most compelling is an interactive game where visitors play the energy minister and have to efficiently power a make-believe country by balancing economic, environmental and political concerns before the prime minister fires them.

The most shocking, however, is the only non-interactive exhibit, showing three photographs of what the future of energy could be, including using live animals to power electrical appliances and leaving human faeces with the hosts at the end of a dinner party or sending children to school with plastic bottles in their backpacks to create hydrogen.

For the Science Museum, having a sponsor like BP that is also a world leader in their subject was an exciting experience. "We always ask our sponsors for help but we are not always able to mine them for information," says Redler.

A BP advisory board headed by Peter Mather, BP head of country, UK, gathered 10 experts from BP in areas from solar energy to hydrocarbons to help with content for the exhibits. One expert, Chris Dewey, senior advisor in future fuels for BP, explained BP's views on the provision of sustainable road transport into the future to colleagues at the museum. "Our challenge is how to make transport sustainable into the future. We took the museum guys into the key issues facing us: the targets we're setting, options for new technologies like biomass fuels, what we're working on at BP and what's happening in the industry.

"The age group targeted by the museum knows all about cars. But these young people are the energy consumers who will use and choose which energy to use in the future," says Dewey. "This exhibition will start raising their consciousness about the issues which need to be addressed to ensure we have sustainable energy in the future.

"We don't have the answers," she adds. "There are a number of potential solutions and our aim is to put both the challenges and the factual information across for everyone to understand."

For the school groups who visit daily, the first step is an introduction to the concept of what life would be like without energy, given by one of the museum's 'Explainer' team. The students, all asked to stand up at the start, have to sit down if they could not live without various comforts: hair straighteners, computers, TVs, cars, and electric lights, for example.



**Activity centre:** BP gathered 10 experts in areas from solar energy to hydrocarbons to help with content for the exhibits, which relate to Energy, Energy today and Energy futures.



Then they get a gentle lesson on how these items are powered and the finite supply of energy they depend on, with the pros and cons of various energy options such as wind power or hydroelectric power described.

Where the kids really get excited is in the interactive gallery, where three energy zones relate to Energy, Energy today and Energy futures. Pairs of students compete on Making energy useful, using a dance mat to catch natural energy resources with appropriate technologies. In the Energy shutdown game, a city has lost power and, using their own energy, students try to make workmen and doctors able to still do their vital jobs. "It really makes you think what could happen," say Ashburton Junior School year six students Agnes, 11 and Tashla, 10. Noughan, 10, a year five student from Melcombe Primary Junior School, who visits the museum a lot, says of the quizzes, facts and case studies on the 'Info Zones', "They teach you something that is fun as well." His teacher Jane Ferguson pronounced the gallery, "an experience that the students will remember."

All the information on the Energy Info Zone terminals is available on the Energy website, along with energy teachers' resource pages. Maximizing outreach from beyond the confines of the ☺

## SANGACHAL LAUNCHES VISITORS' CENTRE

A specially-built visitors' centre at Sangachal terminal, 32 kilometres (20 miles) south of Baku, inspired by the BP-sponsored interactive Energy Gallery at the Science Museum in London, is set to open in May with content created by designers from the original project.

The triangular shaped centre, which faces the Caspian Sea and the terminal, has the two-fold goal of presenting the success story of oil and gas developments in Azerbaijan over the last ten years and educating local people about energy.

"We think that the visitors' centre will be a great tool to educate a young generation to the industry. But it can also share our achievements and transfer our knowledge and bring visibility to partners and government while contributing to the development of the region," says Khatira Iskender, BP's government and community relations manager in Baku.

The cost of the \$3.2 million building and its \$1.6 million exhibition has been shared by BP and its partners in the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli, Shah Deniz, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and South Caucasus pipeline projects that come together in Sangachal.

"We were inspired by the gallery and the team that created it," says Iskender. "We hope their experience with the learning aspect of the gallery will help us with educational tools, hi-tech equipment and innovative ideas to engage and inspire the public of the country achievements in the oil and gas industry in close partnership with the international investors."

After the initial launch, Iskender hopes to develop a range of outreach programmes for students in which younger children come to the terminal to work on science, computer and language skills, while older children receive career advice.



## Energy gallery



museum's location in London is foremost on the mind of BP's Ian Duffy and his Science Museum counterpart Heather Allan, sponsor liaison manager. For Duffy, the gallery has provided a new and exciting backdrop for private views or BP team building events, employee events and the Schools Link programme. "Some people hadn't been to the Science Museum since they were kids and were experiencing it for the first time in 25 years," recalls Duffy.

The relationship between BP and the Science Museum has blossomed beyond the energy gallery. BP has supported an outreach project in 10 schools where students will do a film project on energy and present it in the IMAX cinema at the museum; it has commissioned the Museum to build an exhibition within the visitors' centre in Baku in Azerbaijan (see panel) and museum staff have supported BP Schools Link events.

In the autumn BP hopes to place graduates within the museum as part of its training programme.

"The Science Museum's goal is to maximize its relationship with BP," explains Heather Allan. "We would like to help them meet their objectives on different levels, including corporate responsibility, education strategy and global strategy. This is not an unusual approach for us, but not every funder is BP. Together we are looking to push the frontiers of the relationship. It's a rewarding experience for the Science Museum – hugely enjoyable and thought provoking."

Heather Mayfield, assistant director of the Science Museum, was struck by how interested BP has been in the process of how the Museum does things as well as the products it creates. "We both shared

the desire to get over the complexity of energy world.

"We have learned how a big multinational works. Some things were hugely impressive. Whoever comes is always very well briefed. With 1,000 people in the National Museum of Science and Industry across five sites, we work hard to keep everyone informed, so it's impressive to see how

people are kept informed in a huge multinational company."

From BP's perspective, says Duffy, it's been a chance to use his skills in something creative, and gives an external perspective. "One of the things I enjoy most about working in BP is that through our employee engagement programmes, BP people are given the space to do exciting projects that can make a difference." **BPM**

**"These young people are the energy consumers who will use and choose which energy to use in the future."**

**Chris Dewey**



**Powerful message:** The energy gallery opened in July 2004 to encourage youngsters to understand how energy powers every aspect of their lives.